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On Tap

View upcoming virtual lectures, concerts, classes and other events at the Library of Congress.

WWW.LOC.GOV/EVENTS



Jazz pianist Matthew Whitaker (left) gave a virtual concert commemorating the 90th anniversary of NLS on March 3 with his quartet, including Marcos Robinson on guitar, Karim Hutton on bass and Isaiah Johnson on drums.

National Library Service Kicks Off Yearlong Birthday Party

NLS has been serving blind and print disabled patrons for 90 years as of this month.

BY KRISTEN FERNEKES

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) is celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2021 with curated digital content and features throughout the year. The celebration launched on March 3 with a concert marking the day in 1931 that President Herbert Hoover signed legislation creating a service to provide “books for the adult blind.”

In coming months, NLS will share historical content and events from across its nationwide network of libraries on its various digital channels.

The online concert highlighted noted young jazz musician and

NLS patron Matthew Whitaker, [who performed with his quartet](#). The selection of Whitaker, an innovative artist, composer and arranger, was an apt choice at this time in NLS' history, “as the organization continues its creative and adaptive approach to meeting the needs of Americans with disabilities,” Karen Keninger, NLS' director, said.

Whitaker became interested in music as a toddler, taking immediately to the toy piano he was given by his grandfather. At age 5, he began training in classical piano and reading braille music with Dalia Sakas from the Filomen M. D'Agostino Greenberg Music School in New York City, the only

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DONATED TIME

The following employees have satisfied eligibility requirements to receive leave donations from other staff members. Contact Lisa Davis at lidav@loc.gov.

Bailey Cahall
William Mahannah

Eric Wolfson

COVID-19 UPDATE

The Health Services Division (HSD) recognizes that some employees have received COVID-19 vaccines; however, at this time, the Library is not modifying its on-site health and safety protocols based on the vaccination status of employees. Transmission levels in the local area remain at a level that requires reduced staffing, mask wearing and physical distancing.

Library staff are required to wear masks when they are in shared workspaces where at least six feet of distance cannot be maintained and in common areas, hallways and restrooms.

HSD continues to monitor Library staff members with symptoms, clinical diagnoses or positive test results associated with COVID-19. On March 11, HSD announced that it had received 10 new reports of symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed cases since its previous COVID-19 announcement on March 4. Most employees reporting symptoms are not diagnosed with COVID-19, but, out of caution, the Library is monitoring all reports of symptoms.

HSD is communicating with all staff members who become ill. In cases in which ill individuals were present in Library buildings, HSD is also notifying their close work contacts and cleaning and disinfecting the areas affected.

More information on the Library's pandemic response: <https://go.usa.gov/xdtV5> (intranet) or <https://go.usa.gov/xdtVQ> (public-facing staff webpage)

UPDATED EMERGENCY GUIDANCE

With enhanced security measures continuing to remain in place on Capitol Hill, the Security and Emergency Preparedness Directorate has made available phase 2.2 of its protective action guidance for responding to building emergencies (<https://go.usa.gov/xs9d3>). The updated measures include detailed information about social distancing during emergencies, evacuation assembly areas and best ways to contact emergency services.

Staff are encouraged to download the Joint Emergency Mass Notification System (JEMNS) on their personal devices to receive alerts. For instructions and more information, go to <https://go.usa.gov/xs5mR>.

Learn more about the Library's emergency guidance: <https://go.usa.gov/xs5mQ>.

Questions? Call (202) 707-8708 or send an email message to epp@loc.gov.

MANDATORY IT SECURITY AWARENESS TRAINING

All Library employees, contractors and volunteers who have access to Library computers or other IT systems must take the Library's IT security awareness course annually. The deadline to complete the 2021 course is Sept. 17.

With much of the world continuing to work remotely, hackers are developing ever more sophisticated ways to launch cyberattacks and malware that can endanger users' data and systems. While the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) maintains robust IT security tools to protect the Library against even the latest methods of cyberattack, the first line of defense will always be informed Library staff.

This year's training takes about an hour to finish and can be accessed on the Library's network through the Litmos application. For instructions, go to <https://go.usa.gov/xsvyy>.

Questions? Contact the OCIO service desk at (202) 707-7727 or ocioservicedesk@loc.gov.

GAZETTE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

loc.gov/staff/gazette

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MISSION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Library's central mission is to engage, inspire and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

ABOUT THE GAZETTE

An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at loc.gov/staff/gazette.

GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF

Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.—Ed.

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GAZETTE DEADLINES

The deadline for editorial copy for the April 2 Gazette is Wednesday, March 24.

Email editorial copy and letters to the editor to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

To promote events through the Library's online calendar (www.loc.gov/loc/events) and the Gazette Calendar, email event and contact information to calendar@loc.gov by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

Hispanic Division Connects Researchers with Resources

Staff find innovative ways to reach out.

BY SUZANNE SCHADL

The pandemic has offered the Hispanic Division a unique opportunity to think about connections, the most essential of which is that between people. In the Hispanic Reading Room during normal operations, people connect viscerally with the physical place, where the walls are essential references to the collections and cultures we serve. The pandemic challenged us to bring people and place together on a digital platform.

Our newest librarian, Giselle Aviles, and recent interns from our Huntington Fellowship Program, Maria Guadalupe (Lupita) Partida and Herman Luis Chavez, worked remotely but collaboratively to make our collections, services and physical space accessible digitally, which had the added benefit of making them available to people from all over the world.

Aviles has been working on strategic digital reference and outreach efforts with tools the Library provides and in collaboration with the Geography and Map Division, producing StoryMaps that introduce unique collections and services.

“Traveling Words and Sounds” (<https://go.usa.gov/xsyHv>), for instance, takes visitors on a journey to different Latin American countries and Spain by presenting authors from the PALABRA Archive (<https://go.usa.gov/xsyHS>) and a selection of images. PALABRA consists of original audio recordings of Luso-Hispanic poets and writers reading from their works.

The magic of this adventure is listening to authors in multiple languages and appreciating their words and sounds while learning about their countries. The narration begins with the image of a train in Guatemala, which introduces 100 authors that are pinned to their countries on a digital map



Hispanic Division staff have collaborated remotely to complete new projects on civil rights, poetry and literature and murals in the Hispanic Reading Room.

at the end of the presentation.

Another StoryMap, “If These Walls Could Talk” (<https://go.usa.gov/xsy6H>), engages visitors on a virtual tour of the magnificent Cândido Portinari murals in the Hispanic Reading Room. The immersive experience is a stage for learning about a shared experience of the U.S. and Latin America. It ends with information about Portinari and links to resources from the digital collections.

A third StoryMap in process highlights connections between “The Handbook of Latin American Studies” (<https://go.usa.gov/xsyFT>), its contributing editors, the countries they research and collection items at the Library. These StoryMaps have been a valuable way to bring people, place and the Library’s digital resources together.

Partida and Chavez created “A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States” (<https://go.usa.gov/xsyFB>). This research guide highlights 20th- and 21st-century U.S. court cases, legislation and events that have had significant impact on civil rights for Chicano, Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American and Puerto Rican communities. With nearly 9,000 visits since its creation in October 2020, the evolving online

guide offers the first comprehensive compendium of civil rights resources related to these communities.

Drawing from online collections and external sources, each page covers a single case or event with a brief overview, timeline and associated research materials. The guide includes references to legal representation, immigration, medical care, equal access to education and more.

During Hispanic Heritage Month in September, Partida and Chavez will host season two of the Hispanic Division’s “La Biblioteca” podcast (<https://go.usa.gov/xsyMq>). The season’s six episodes will expand on the resource guide and explore topics including the emergence of the term “Latinx” as an identity, Generation Z student activism, the history of temporary protected status and issues related to medical care and environmental justice.

The work of Aviles, Partida and Chavez has inspired colleagues in the division and new users alike, and it is important to acknowledge their achievements in connecting us across a difficult year marked by pandemic and remote work. ■

The staff of the Hispanic Division contributed to this article.

Civics Series Examines Digital-Age Communications

A panel of experts outlined challenges citizens face in the online environment.

BY ANDREW BREINER

The John W. Kluge Center last week held the first public event in its new civic engagement series, “Our Common Purpose” (<https://go.usa.gov/xsfp4>), created with Danielle Allen, recipient of the 2020 Kluge Prize for Achievement in the Study of Humanity.

Allen hosted “Using Civic Media to Build a Better Society” on March 11, bringing together experts on the use and misuse of media to discuss the role of information in democratic societies, the difficulties of balancing open discourse with safety from abuse and the challenges citizens face in consuming the deluge of materials available in the digital age.

“We can all see the way in which our information systems, our media spaces, are undermining healthy democratic life,” Allen said in introducing the event, which explored how to “build and use civic media for a healthier, stronger society.”

Brendesha Tynes of the University of Southern California studies how youth experience digital media and how it affects their academic and social development. She said her interest in the ways people interact online grew after she saw how often people use racial and gender-based epithets and slurs when they’re able to act anonymously.

Richard Young said he founded CivicLex, a Lexington, Kentucky, nonprofit that uses technology and social practices to strengthen civic engagement, after he witnessed a moment in the city council chambers when significant legislation was being considered that would impact much of the community. Despite its importance, only two people arrived to comment on the



Danielle Allen (clockwise from bottom left) moderates a discussion about civic media with Talia Stroud, Brendesha Tynes and Richard Young on March 11.

matter, he said, both of them lawyers. Young was concerned about this lack of involvement in matters affecting the future of local communities.

Talia Stroud of the University of Texas is a nationally renowned expert on commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways to improve media. She talked about hearing from a news executive whose organization had decided against moderating comments on its news stories. When a series of stories about immigration received many racist comments, the executive became concerned, Stroud said, that allowing those comments to sit alongside the journalism was helping them move into regular discourse.

Stroud said that intentionality is essential when creating an environment for news and discourse. “There are a lot of things that any organization, whether a news platform or a social media organization can and should do as they think about the spaces they create online,” she said. “If you want an environment that doesn’t have

some of these comments that are offensive, that are racist, ... what sort of moderation scheme might you put in place to remove them if they’re there, and how effective is that moderation scheme?”

Tynes discussed the importance of countering racially hateful messages expressed online with what she calls “critical race digital literacy.” This means spreading awareness and education about the history and context around racist tropes. “I think having people place the messages in historical context will help them to better situate the message, and in some ways it almost takes the sting off of that message,” Tynes said.

One way CivicLex counters harassment, Young said, is by fostering relationships between constituents and their elected officials. “The real importance of that is helping people see that their elected officials are not just figureheads that get elected. They’re humans that live near them and go to the same grocery stores as them.”

Watch a recording [here](#). ■



Michael Ratner

Michael Ratner

Michael Ratner is a specialist in energy policy in the Congressional Research Service and a Kluge Center staff fellow.

Tell us a little about your background.

I am originally from New York and grew up on Long Island. I went to Columbia University, where I discovered the topic of energy while earning a bachelor's degree in international relations. Later, in graduate school at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), I earned a master's degree in international economics and U.S. foreign policy, which allowed me to break into the energy field.

What brought you to the Library, and what do you do?

After SAIS, I worked in the energy industry for about a dozen years before joining the Central Intelligence Agency. I came to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) about 10 years ago.

One of my first jobs out of college was for a member of the House of Representatives, where I learned about this amazing institution known as CRS. When I saw an energy position open up, I could

not resist applying. I am so happy I did.

What inspired you to apply for a Kluge Center staff fellowship?

When I was thinking about applying for the fellowship, I viewed it as an opportunity to reflect on my work at CRS. As a specialist in energy policy, I answer congressional requests as they come in and write reports on topics of interest to Congress. It is a constant process. The fellowship has allowed me to take a breath.

My topic is evolving global natural gas markets and their effects on U.S. national security. The U.S. and global natural gas markets are in a state of flux, in part because of development of gas from shale in the United States, which has made the U.S. a key player when it comes to natural gas.

Changes in the global energy mix, driven to a degree by the U.S., will have pluses and minuses for many countries, prompting changes in the geopolitical landscape. How these play out may have ramifications for U.S. national security.

For my research, I am mainly using books and periodicals from the Business Reading Room. I have multiple goals for my research, including helping to define natural-gas-specific items in the Library's collections, leading to a research guide; a long paper or book chapter; and possibly a conference on a related topic.

The fellowship application process was not difficult, but it took some time to sort out what I wanted to research and to find out more about the energy resources in the Library's collections. Overall, I felt like the application process helped me jump-start my research.

I encourage all my colleagues to consider applying for the fellowship. The Kluge Center staff are very helpful and encouraging and, even during this time of telework, have made the fellowship a great experience. I feel as if I have time to research tangents to my topic and go down different paths and see where the research takes me.

Also, one of my favorite things to do is wander the stacks and see what is there. It has been wonderful!

What do you enjoy doing outside work?

I like to do things with my family and work around the house, especially in the yard. My big project over the summer was to finally fence in our backyard, so our dog can go out and play. It has worked out pretty well, but she does not like to go out by herself, especially when it is cold out.

What is something your co-workers may not know about you?

I lived in Pakistan for almost a year when I worked for an international electric power company and traveled to every province while I was there. ■

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: HOMEGROWN CONCERTS

Ialoni

March 24, noon

Women's ensemble Ialoni was formed in 2009 in Tbilisi in the Republic of Georgia. Its repertoire draws from all three branches of Georgian vocal polyphony: ecclesiastical, folk and city music.

Ranina Quartet

March 24, 12:30 p.m.

The Ranina Quartet is a new music ensemble from the Republic of Georgia. Its repertoire features Georgian traditional music, including urban songs, folk songs and chants.

The March 24 concerts will premiere on the Facebook page of the American Folklife Center and on the Library's YouTube site.

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community music school for the blind and visually impaired in the U.S. Whitaker entered the Julliard School in fall 2019 as the first blind undergraduate student to join its jazz studies program.

Whitaker has gained recognition from musical peers and fans alike. He has been featured on “60 Minutes” and invited by Stevie Wonder to perform Wonder’s classic “I Wish” for the revival of “Showtime at the Apollo.” The Root named him one of 25 young futurist leaders, and he has been described as “the very essence of a musical prodigy.”

“NLS is proud to have had the opportunity to contribute to the success of musicians and aspiring artists,” Keninger said.

In [an interview with Whitaker](#) that took place before the concert, Keninger mentioned NLS’ use of technology to expand its impressive music catalog, specifically its use of optical scanning to convert rare, hard-copy braille scores to digital.

Whitaker shared his appreciation. “I’m so happy that you guys are getting into that. ... I’m glad that you guys are always finding ways for us as blind individuals to have access, because other people have access to print music,” he said. “I feel that everybody should have a way of accessing music whether visually impaired or not.”

“We are so pleased to have this moment to celebrate this anniversary with our staff, network libraries, patrons and the public,” Keninger said. “At NLS, we are constantly changing and improving, and advances in technology are helping us to bring people more content, more easily. Sometimes it’s good to take a look back at what we’ve accomplished.”

The Library has long been committed to serving readers with disabilities. The concept of a national library for the blind was introduced in 1897 with the establishment of a reading room for the blind. In 1913, Congress began to require that

one copy of each book be made in raised characters and deposited in the Library for educational use. As impressive as this collection was, it was not widely available to those who could not visit the Library in person.

To remedy this inability to serve the broader need of blind readers, identical bills were introduced in 1930 by Rep. Ruth Pratt of New York and Sen. Reed Smoot of Utah to provide service to blind readers on a national scale through an appropriation to be expended under the direction of the Librarian of Congress.

In support of the legislation, Rep. Louis Ludlow of Indiana recounted, “I have now in mind an old mother who resides less than two miles from this Capitol. ... Her eyes, the windows of as sweet a soul as ever graced God’s footstool, have gone out. At regular intervals a messenger from the Library of Congress delivers at her home a braille book, and if you could see the light of

happiness that comes over her face at such times, as I have seen it, you will have no doubt of the good this legislation will accomplish.”

The Pratt-Smoot Act became law on March 3, 1931, creating what we now know as NLS. The law has been amended several times, expanding the service beyond adults who are blind to include children and people with physical and reading disabilities. In addition to extending the reach of the collection, Congress also expanded the diversity and richness of the service by, in 1962, authorizing NLS to collect and maintain a library of musical scores and instructional texts. That collection is now the largest of its kind in the world.

“NLS’ work is as important today as it has ever been,” Keninger said. “We have great deal to be proud of, and to look forward to.”

For more information about the NLS 90th anniversary, visit www.loc.gov/nls. ■

A YEAR OF PANDEMIC OPERATIONS



Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden [addressed staff by video](#) on March 11 to mark a milestone: It has been a full year now since the Library modified its operations to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The Library’s work has endured during these unprecedented times, Hayden said, thanks to the devotion and flexibility of staff.

Your Employee Personal Page (EPP) is at
www.nfc.usda.gov/epps/